



12th February 2025

Dr Jennifer Carroll Mac Neill, TD
Minister for Health
Department of Health
Block 1,
Miesian Plaza,
50 – 58 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin 2,
D02 XW14

By email to jennifer.carrollmacneill@oireachtas.ie and by post

Dear Minister Carroll MacNeill,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Health. We look forward to working with you over your term of office to ensure that health services in Ireland continue to be provided to a high standard, through a publicly funded system.

Fórsa is the largest public sector union in Ireland, and the fastest growing. At the end of last year our overall membership was close to 90,000 with over a third working in the health sector in Ireland. We represent over 32,000 health workers including health and social care professionals, pharmacy staff, clerical, administrative, management and technical staff working within the Health Service Executive and funded agencies, Tusla and the wider Community & Voluntary Sector.

As the incoming Minister, we wish to make you aware of three significant issues that are of serious concern to our members. They are:

1. The HSE Pay and Numbers Strategy:

Fórsa, along with other unions, have received a mandate for industrial action due to the impact of the current HSE Pay and Numbers Strategy on the ability to deliver services across the country. Persistent shortages have placed an unsustainable burden on existing staff, leading to increased workloads, burnout, and compromised service delivery. Without a strategic and immediate revision of staffing policies and the associated workforce planning processes, these issues will continue to escalate, threatening the resilience and capacity of our members to deliver safe services.



2. Low morale within the workplace:

We must draw your attention to the growing concern of low morale among healthcare workers of all grades. The persistent challenges have taken a significant toll on the wellbeing and motivation of our members. Many feel undervalued and overburdened. These feelings have been compounded by the significant restructuring in multiple organisations across the sector.

It is important that steps are taken to address the underlying issues, as sustained low morale risks further exacerbating workforce retention challenges and compromising service delivery. We urge you to prioritize policies that uplift and support the dedicated individuals who form the backbone of this sector and without whom services could not be provided.

3. Section 39 Workers:

You will be aware of this pay dispute from your previous term of office and the commitments given by your party in relation to the matter. It is important to advise you that the Department of Health has been in pay negotiations with the group of unions representing workers in this sector throughout 2024. In December 2024, the representatives of government informed the unions that *'in the context of the current government formation process, and the reduced day-to-day engagement with outgoing Ministers, it has not been possible for the Departments to achieve any change to our existing mandate for these negotiations it is therefore proposed that the WRC would formally adjourn the talks until departments are in a position to get a renewed mandate from an incoming Government and new Ministers. These developments are anticipated in early 2025'*.

We call on you as the newly appointed Minister for Health to provide your officials with the mandate to re-enter the WRC process and to bring this matter to conclusion – the continued level of uncertainty for those who work in this sector, the service users and their communities is unnecessary, and it beholds us all to find a sustainable solution.

A high-level meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these matters in greater detail is required and requested. We believe that collaborative engagement is essential to finding solutions that benefit all stakeholders.

Finally, we wish to extend to you an invitation to address our upcoming biennial Health & Welfare Conference which takes place in Letterkenny in May 2025 from the 14th to 16th. Previous Ministers have taken the opportunity to address our in-person



conference of over 200 delegates from around the country. Should you be available, we will work with your office to agree a suitable time on the agenda for Thursday 15th May.

Our members look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ashley Connolly".

Ashley Connolly
Head of Division

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda Kelly".

Linda Kelly
National Secretary